FRAUD ALERT

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Clerk of the Circuit Court
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FRAUD ALERT

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Scammers Turning to Bogus Google Calendar Invitations to Defraud Consumers

A new invitation pops up on your Google Calendar, alerting you that you won a prize! Awesome! But not so fast – scammers are turning to Google Calendar as a new method of contacting potential fraud victims.

The scam works like this: first, a fraudster sends a calendar invitation to a victim's email address. The default setting for a Google Calendar is to automatically update a user's calendar to include invitation messages whether or not the user accepts the invitation. Often, these invitations to fake events inform the recipient they won a prize or have received a wire transfer. The invitation may include a short summary urging the consumer to open an attachment or click on a link.

Regardless of the pretense for the calendar invitation, the result is the same. If the victim opens a malware-laden attachment or clicks on a link in the invitation, they will expose their computer to viruses or be sent to a phishing website. If they take the bait by entering sensitive financial information like their bank account or credit card numbers to the "organizer" of the event, they are likely to end up as identity theft victims.

In reality, there is no money, and any information the victim shares will likely be used by a criminal to steal their identity, drain their bank accounts, or run up their credit cards. Fraudsters are turning to the new Google Calendar scam because savvy consumers have become better at avoiding falling victim to phishing emails or text messages. Fortunately, there are a few things you can do to protect yourself:

- **Don't click on suspicious links or attachments:** Only click on calendar meetings from people that you recognize. If the invitation is from someone you don't know, and are not expecting to hear from, it is probably a scam.

- **Report calendar spam:** Reporting calendar spam to Google not only helps Google block spam in the future, but it also removes the spam from your calendar. Learn how to report Google Calendar spam.

- **Change your settings to prevent meeting invitations from automatically popping up in your calendar:** By default, any time someone sends you a calendar invite, whether it's a friend, coworker, or fraudster, it automatically pops up in your Google Calendar as a meeting. However, you can change this. To prevent a scammer from adding meetings to your calendar, change your calendar settings so that you must approve each meeting invitation before it appears on your calendar. To change this setting:

1. Open your Google Calendar app or go to https://calendar.google.com in your browser.
2. At the top right, click the Settings icon.
3. In the General tab, click Event settings >Automatically add invitations.
4. Select "No, only show invitations to which I have responded."

Have you been a victim of a Google Calendar scam? Have you received several fake calendar invites? You can file a complaint at Fraud.org via their secure online complaint form. They will share your complaint with their network of more than 90 federal, state, and local law enforcement and consumer protection agency partners who can hold these unscrupulous businesses accountable.

To report suspected fraud, call (727) 464-6200.

Source: www.fraud.org/google_calendar_alert "Scammers turning to bogus Google Calendar invitations to defraud consumers"

For more information or to file a complaint, contact Pinellas County Consumer Protection at (727) 464-6200 or visit www.pinellascounty.org/consumer.